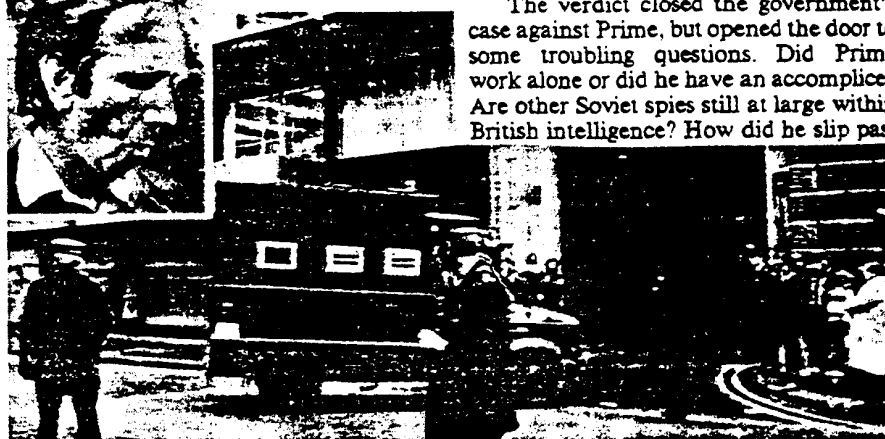ARTICLE APPEARED
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The Molester

Justice for a British spy

"**Y**ou have done incalculable harm to the interests and security of this country and to the interests and security of our friends and allies." With those words Lord Chief Justice Lane sentenced Geoffrey Arthur Prime, 44, to 35 years in prison for passing government secrets to the Soviet Union between 1968 and 1981. Prime pleaded guilty to seven counts of violating Britain's Official Secrets Act. For most of those 14 years, Prime worked as a Russian language specialist at the top-secret electronic intelligence center at Cheltenham. The facility, part of a four-nation intelligence network that includes the U.S., Australia and Canada, serves as

tioned in Potsdam "about allied activities that were top secret."

Prime was arrested last April for a sex offense involving a 14-year-old girl. Shortly afterward, his wife Rhona discovered spying equipment under a bed and reported it to the police. Eventually, Prime confessed to being both a spy and a sex offender. During the two-hour trial at London's historic Old Bailey, Lord Lane sentenced Prime to an additional three years in prison for molesting three young girls. Said Lane: "Your ruthlessness is demonstrated not only by what you did with this country's secrets but by what you did to those girls. You made the choice and you must suffer."

The verdict closed the government's case against Prime, but opened the door to some troubling questions. Did Prime work alone or did he have an accomplice? Are other Soviet spies still at large within British intelligence? How did he slip past

Prime shortly after his arrest, inset, and arriving last week at London's Old Bailey

His life as a Soviet mole reads like a chapter from a John le Carré novel.

the nerve center for worldwide monitoring of Soviet communications. Prime had access to sensitive data on the identification of the targets of British and American surveillance efforts. As a senior translator at Cheltenham, he could have told the Soviets which of their communications were being monitored and which codes were being broken.

The court's account of Prime's life as a "mole" reads like a chapter from a John le Carré novel. According to a statement Prime gave police, he first offered his services to the Soviet Union in 1968, when he was stationed with the Royal Air Force in West Berlin. The Soviets equipped Prime with a miniature camera, a briefcase with a secret compartment, coding and decoding materials, money (a rather modest £10,000 over the years) and the names of two contacts, Igor and Valya. After leaving the R.A.F., Prime returned to London later that year to work for the Joint Technical Language Service. He continued passing secret information to the Soviets even after resigning his government post at Cheltenham in 1977. Prime's final meeting with Soviet agents came in November 1981, when, he said, he was ques-

four security checks within a ten-year period? Barred by British law from discussing the case during the trial, both the press and opposition members of Parliament last week demanded a full explanation from the government of Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. Scoffed the *Daily Express:* "Our surveillance system is reduced to a laughing stock. What has a Soviet spy to do to bring himself to the notice of our counterespionage—wear an I LOVE BREZHNEV badge?"

Facing an anxious, upset House of Commons last week, Thatcher announced that the Security Commission, Britain's highest level investigative body in such matters, will look into the Prime case and make recommendations about anti-spy measures. Said Thatcher: "It is not only British interests that have been damaged. The damage extends to the interests of the United States Government. And, of course, the damage of our own and U.S. interests is damage to the Atlantic Alliance as a whole." Though the full extent of the damage done by Prime may never be known, its deleterious effect on the reputation of Britain's intelligence services was all too clear. ∎